



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP)'s first annual wolf program report is available, summarizing successful efforts to implement the approved state plan to the extent allowed by federal regulations. FWP leads wolf monitoring, directs conflict management, coordinates and authorizes research, and leads outreach efforts. FWP works closely with tribes, a variety of other state and federal agencies, interested organizations and individuals to begin the transition to managing wolves like other wildlife.

Montana's wolf conservation and management plan is based on the work of the wolf advisory council, a diverse working group. Its balanced approach ensures the long-term success of wolf recovery in a landscape where people live, work, and recreate. The plan:

- recognizes wolves as a native species and part of Montana's wildlife heritage,
- allows wolves to find their place on the landscape similar to other wildlife, and
- addresses and resolve conflicts.

2005 Highlights

Wolf Numbers

- The population is secure but dynamic. Wolves share a landscape with people. Like other wildlife species, Montana's wolf population is subject to checks and balances, including strong reproduction in some areas, disease, vehicle strikes, and mortality due to conflicts with people.
- FWP invited the public to help monitor wolves by reporting wolves and wolf sign through the FWP website. The response was very positive, and the information led to verification of new packs.
- Fourteen new wolf packs were documented in 2005. Fourteen other packs no longer existed at year's end for a variety of reasons, including natural and human-caused mortality. Approximately 56 wolves died in 2005, about half as the result of conflicts with livestock. Five wolves were killed on Montana's highways.
- Mange was documented in several southwest Montana wolf packs. Most live-captured wolves had been exposed to various canine viral diseases, but survived. Neither parasites nor disease appeared to significantly affect Montana's overall wolf population growth.
- The Montana population increased from 2004 to 2005. This was due to: (1) the state's increased effort to document wolf activity and monitor packs with a staff of six people; (2) an actual increase in wolf numbers; and (3) border packs tallying in the Montana population for the first time.
- As of December 31, 2005, there was an estimated minimum of 256 wolves in 46 verified packs, 19 of which met the breeding pair criteria.
 - In the endangered area across northern Montana, there was minimum of 126 wolves in 19 verified packs, 10 of which counted as breeding pairs. Several new packs were verified in 2005.
 - In the experimental area across southern Montana, there was a minimum of 130 wolves in 27 packs, 9 of which were breeding pairs. Several new packs were verified.

Distribution

- Many new packs in 2005 were documented in central and western Montana -- from near Helena, west to the Montana-Idaho border and south to the Big Hole Valley. Wolf numbers inside Yellowstone National Park decreased in 2005, which could lead to fewer Yellowstone wolves dispersing into Montana. However, Idaho wolf numbers increased, possibly leading to more wolves dispersing into Montana.
- Statewide, wolf distribution is within expected areas in northwest, west and central Montana. But wolves are great travelers and could show up anywhere in Montana.

Outreach Activities

- Increasing public awareness of wolves, wolf management, the federal regulations, and the state's plan is a top priority for FWP. FWP works with local communities to incorporate wolves into the landscape and to strike the balance between wolves and people.
- Outreach efforts take many forms, including one-on-one conversations, media interviews, printed materials, and formal presentations to a wide variety of school, civic, and special interest groups.
- FWP wolf staff gave a minimum of 79 presentations in 2005 and spoke to thousands of people about wolf ecology, wolf-livestock interactions, wolf-big game interactions, human safety, and the state's plan.
- FWP's wolf staff is greatly assisted by FWP biologists, game wardens, and other agency personnel. Other agencies such as USDA Wildlife Services (WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and others also make significant contributions to the outreach efforts.
- FWP's wolf management web pages were redesigned to provide better, more timely information to the public. The public can also report wolf activity online. See: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

Wolf-Livestock Interactions

- Montana wolves routinely encounter livestock, though preying on them seems to be a "learned" behavior. Wolf depredation on livestock is difficult to predict in space and time. Nonetheless, FWP and USDA Wildlife Services (WS) work with livestock producers to decrease risk of loss to the extent possible.
- FWP and WS work together to address conflicts using a combination of non-lethal and lethal tools. Federal regulations and the state plan guide FWP's decision-making. Conflicts are addressed on a case-by-case, incremental basis, striving to connect the agency response to the damage in space and time. This is similar to the approach taken when other wildlife species damage private property in Montana.
- A working group is currently developing the framework for a Montana-based loss-reimbursement program.
- Confirmed livestock losses decreased in 2005, despite the increased wolf population. WS confirmed that wolves killed 23 cattle, 33 sheep, 1 dog and 2 horses in calendar year 2005. Additional losses and injuries occurred, but could not be verified.
- A total of 35 wolves were killed to prevent further depredations, 7 of which were killed by private citizens under the new 2005 10j regulations in the experimental area. Proactive, non-lethal tools were also used.

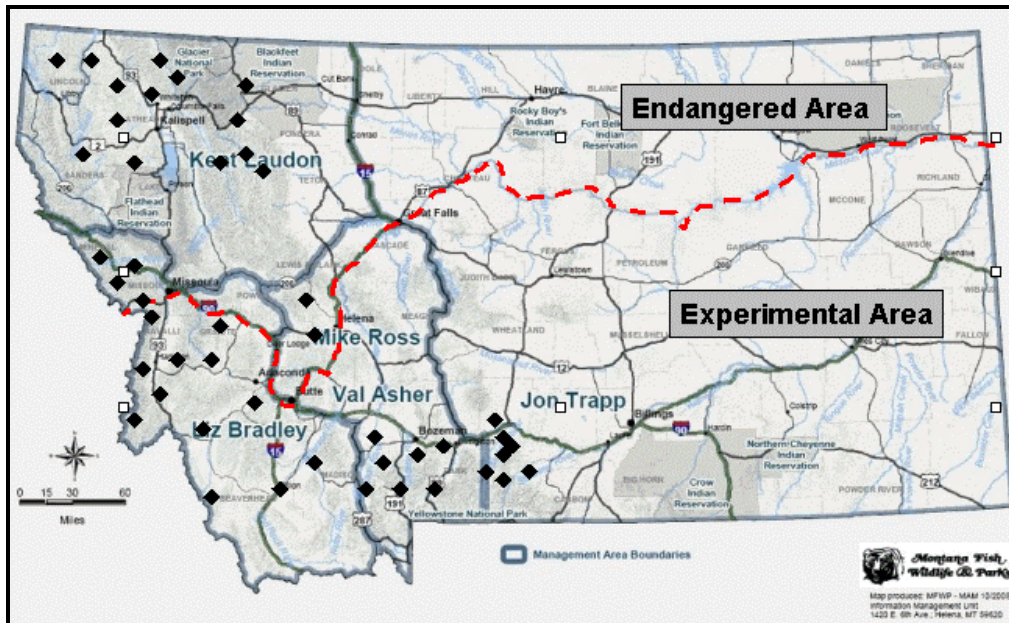
Funding and Delisting

- With Montanans' support, FWP took on the added responsibility of wolf conservation and management in 2005, contingent on federal funding. In federal fiscal year 2005, Montana received about \$607,000. Additional funds are expected in 2006.
- Montana believes that the adequacy of funding will determine the degree to which people will share the land with wolves and how successfully the state will rise to the challenges and opportunities posed by wolf recovery. Those challenges and opportunities are shared by a nation that values its wildlife.
- Montana and Idaho continue to explore ways of delisting gray wolves separately from Wyoming, given the recovered status of the northern Rockies population and the individually approved state plans.
- Montana's Governor Schweitzer and Idaho's Governor Kempthorne sent a letter to the Department of the Interior outlining several options to decouple Montana and Idaho from Wyoming and to move forward. Effort will be ongoing in 2006.

See: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf

- to read and download the full report
- to report wolves and wolf sign
- to learn more about wolves, federal regulations, and the state program

2005 Montana Wolf Packs



Who do I contact?

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

(to get information about wolves and wolf management):

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USDA Wildlife Services

(to request investigations of injured or dead livestock):

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Jim Hoover
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To Report a Dead Wolf or Possible Illegal Activity:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
 Missoula, Montana: (406) 329-3000
 Bozeman, Montana: (406) 582-0336
 Casper, Wyoming: (307) 261-6365

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
1-800-TIP-MONT